

In 1996, GreenCOM assisted USAID/Malawi and the Malawian government in developing a national strategy for communication and education, an important step in implementing the country's national environmental action plan. The overall goals of the strategy were to generate a common vision for communication and education among disparate groups and to agree on a framework for action that ensured the full participation of all sectors and levels of society. The strategy was also meant to enhance existing activities and to identify potential areas of expansion for the future.



Participatory Strategy Formation

To develop Malawi's environmental communication and education strategy, GreenCOM facilitated a multi-step process that engaged a wide variety of stakeholders including government ministries, NGOs, primary, secondary, and post-secondary educators, funding agencies, and the mass media. Steps in the process were:

■ **Literature Review**

Project staff studied relevant materials to gauge the state of communication and education on the environment in Malawi. Documents included the national environmental action plan and publications produced by NGOs and government-sponsored programs.

■ **Environmental Communication and Education Assessment**

GreenCOM conducted in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of individuals involved in various environmental communication and education activities. The objectives were to map current initiatives, evaluate what was working and what was not, and identify resources and opportunities for future initiatives. Interviewees included NGO representatives, government officials, extensionists, educators from primary and secondary schools, technical schools, and universities, and radio and print journalists.

In addition to interviews, GreenCOM also conducted an inventory of available resources such as organizational capacity, curriculum materials for teachers and students, public communication materials, and funding.

■ **Draft Strategy Formulation and Workshop**

A draft strategy was produced and distributed to the individuals interviewed with an invitation to attend a strategy development workshop. At the workshop, each section of the

document was reviewed and suggestions for amendments were made. The participants had opportunities to discuss and experience (through field trips) various dimensions of environmental communication and education in Malawi. Their feedback was incorporated in a second draft that was redistributed for final comment before it was adopted by the government.

Outcomes and Recommendations

The strategy that emerged from this process outlined an environmental communication and education agenda to meet Malawi's particular cultural and environmental needs. It also proposed a range of recommended activities that practitioners and funding agencies could implement according to their own interests and resources. Special emphasis was placed on the need to involve private sector resources in expanding communication and education programs.

GreenCOM and project partners included provisions in the strategy to ensure coordination of activities and they stressed the importance of monitoring and evaluation by proposing performance indicators for measuring overall progress and individual project experiences. Other lessons learned are listed below.

1. Involving multiple stakeholders is essential.

The individuals who took part in the strategy formation workshop came with different perceptions about the meaning and objectives of environmental communication and education. GreenCOM considered this an opportunity, not a drawback, because it led to



a strategy that represented multiple viewpoints. Despite their differences, organized discussions and field trips enabled participants to achieve a common vision.

2. When resources are limited, integrating interventions in existing projects is critical.

Although workshop participants recognized the need to seek new resources (material, human, and financial), they also learned that the impact of existing initiatives could be multiplied by integrating them in larger programs. For example, schools could introduce environmental education as a part of in-service training already mandated for teachers.

3. Coordinating efforts increases impact and extends the reach of scarce resources.

Malawi had many organizations that were involved in environmental communication and education. GreenCOM pointed out that their overall impact could be increased if they coordinated their efforts and pooled their financial and material resources. In addition, formal educators and non-formal communication practitioners needed to collaborate more closely to supplement and complement one another's work. For example, formal environmental education activities, which are costly and have long-term impact, should be supported by less expensive non-formal interventions that demonstrate impact in a shorter timeframe.

4. Incorporating indigenous knowledge is necessary if all segments of the population are to be involved.

GreenCOM's assessment and discussions at the strategy workshop revealed many indigenous knowledge systems and traditional practices that promoted environmental protection. Project staff recommended that practitioners

study and adapt indigenous knowledge more intensively to reach certain target populations.

5. Government and funding agencies need to provide additional opportunities for professional training in environmental education methods and approaches.

Workshop participants requested additional training in environmental communication and education methods. Fortunately, GreenCOM's assessment identified expertise in a number of Malawian institutions that could be tapped for short courses and training workshops. Because most communication and education



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interventions had not been evaluated, training in evaluation methods should also be a component of all offerings.

- 6. There is a strong need to focus on adolescents and younger children.** Stakeholders agreed that raising public awareness of environmental issues and

promoting specific positive actions was their primary objective. However, because almost half of Malawi's population consists of adolescent youth and children, priority should be given to environmental education for those groups, as they are most likely to reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of environmental change.

Selected Publication

Allen, Irma, Sosten S. Chiotha, Felix Kalowekamo, and Monique Trudel. *National Environmental Education and Communication Strategy, 1996–1999*. Lilongwe, Malawi: Ministry of Research and Environmental Affairs, 1996.



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